



**WORKSHOP 'When the Body Becomes all Song...'**  
**Saskia Kersenboom, [www.paramparai.eu](http://www.paramparai.eu)**

**Outline**

This two day workshop aims to create an *embodied* awareness of the rich, multi-disciplinary performing art *DASI ATTAM* – ‘*dance of the devadasis*’ through active participation in Rhythm, Dance, Music and Mime. Its transmission is deeply *embedded* in the vast history of Tamilnadu, South India - that forms the cultural context for mimetic interpretation.

**Day I: a. Rhythm (2hrs.)**

Initially, students will learn how to employ the body as an instrument of memorization: counting and beating rhythm cycles, recitation solo, as a group or in ‘canon’ formation.

**b. Dance (2hrs.)**

Interiorisation of these basic rhythmical patterns is followed up by their application to dance steps, both simple beating and more complex foot/ hand coordinations.

Finally, these achievements should result in a simple choreography that students are able to recite, analyse and execute together.

**c. Cultural context (1hr.): ‘Eye to Eye with Goddess Kamakshi’ –**

Weekly procession of the goddess on her golden chariot. This interactive DVD shows the functional place of music and dance in South Indian temple rituals; to be precise: in Kanchipuram, where Smt.T. Balasaraswati did her *arangetram* at the age of seven!

**Day II: Music and Mime**

**a. Music (2hrs.)**

To begin with, students will learn how to sing a melodic scale of South Indian *Karnatik* music, set to the rhythm cycle practiced earlier.

**b. Mime (2hrs.)**

This is followed by a very basic training in hand-gestures ‘*mudras*’ to be used in mime.

A simple, yet central fragment from a *Varnam* -a Tamil song for dance- is analysed and explained in its cultural context. Next, melody phrase, dance steps, Tamil poetry and hand gestures will merge into a mimetic dance dramaturgy that students will be able perform.

**c. Cultural context: (1 hr.): ‘The Smile of Tyagaraja’ – journey into Bharata Natyam**

one month residency in Tiruvarur, next door to the temple of Shri Tyagarajasvami: this documentary takes students of dance to the world of *Varnams*, *Padams* and *Javalis* that hail from major shrines in the Kaveri Delta and from the court of Tanjavur – a royal lineage to which Smt. T.Balasaraswati’s family was attached for seven generations.